

## Some commonly asked questions (and answers) about the Regional Transit System

### Why is the RTA proposing this system?

Transportation and growth problems are regional. They don't stop at county lines. Many people live in one county and work or go to school in another. The solutions the RTA proposes must also be regional.

In RCW 81.112.010, the state Legislature "recognizes that existing transportation facilities in the central Puget Sound area are inadequate to address mobility needs of the area. The geography of the region, travel demand growth, and public resistance to new roadways combine to further necessitate the rapid development of alternative modes of travel." That same law allowed counties in the most populated region in the state to create a single agency — the RTA — to plan and put in place a regional transit system as part of the overall

regional transportation network.

After much study and more than a thousand meetings with citizens, the RTA adopted this proposal to respond to our region's transportation needs. The proposal also helps address other regional issues associated with transportation. The proposed system can help local governments achieve their growth management objectives.

### What if I don't live near a rail line?

The proposed transit system offers more than rail. Trains, buses, shuttles and simple connections between them can provide easier access to jobs and other destinations, less demand for new roads, cleaner air and a healthier economy.

With the rail and regional bus lines linking the region's cities, the local bus system will be able to better respond to local needs — providing more crosstown, more

suburb-to-suburb, and more east-west service. People will have many more choices for commuting and traveling around their communities. This offers local governments more flexibility in managing transportation demand and meeting state goals to reduce the number of drive-alone commutes.

### How accurate is the technical analysis for the proposed system?

An independent expert review panel appointed by the governor, the state Legislature, and the Washington State Department of Transportation reviewed the RTA's Phase I plan and the methods used to estimate costs and ridership. The panel found the RTA's cost estimates reasonable and the ridership forecasts conservatively low.



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### For more information...

This document is being provided pursuant to the requirements of RCW 81.104.140 (8). If you'd like more information about the Regional Transit Authority or the regional transit system, please call us toll free at 1-800-201-4900, or write the Regional Transit Authority, 821 Second Ave. M.S. 151, Seattle, WA 98104-1598. This information is available in accessible formats on request at 684-2046 (voice) or 684-1395 (TDD).

## It's your move!

On March 14, Puget Sound area citizens will have the chance to vote on a Phase I regional transit system that includes commuter rail, light rail, and expanded bus service linking Pierce, King and Snohomish counties.



## The Regional Transit System Proposal

February, 1995

A proposal to the voters by the  
Regional Transit Authority  
See inside for details



## Regional questions . . .

### How do we deal with a growing traffic problem?

Traffic. It gets worse each year. Freeway speeds will continue to drop over the next 25 years to about 18 m.p.h. One way out of the jam is finding a way around it. The regional transit system proposed by the RTA helps fight worsening congestion by giving automobile commuters another choice — a rail and bus transit system that bypasses traffic.



### Where and how should our region grow?

There's no question that our region is growing. In another 25 years there will be 1.4 million more people living here (half that number will be children of people already living here). Where and how the region grows is important to all of us. The region's growth plan calls for concentrating much of the new growth in cities and other major centers. Under the RTA's proposed rail/bus network those centers will be connected by transit. Those transportation links can help make that growth plan work by supporting adopted land-use and transportation demand management goals within our region.



### How do we move more people in the face of growing gridlock?

As our population grows, so does its urge to get up and go. The number of trips people make around the region has increased 450 percent in the last 30 years. We need capacity to move many more people. It would be difficult to find the space to build new highways and the financial and environmental costs would be high.

The proposed light-rail system provides the same people-moving capacity as a 12-lane freeway. The Washington State Department of Transportation estimated that a freeway system designed to meet comparable regional needs would cost at least \$14 billion.

RTA technical analysis shows that the regional transit system is expected to increase the number of people using transit by 45 percent — a total of 109 million riders per year by 2010. The new transit system will allow transit ridership to grow at a rate faster than population and total trips.



### How do we keep our regional economy healthy?

Traffic congestion wastes time and money — about \$1.2 billion worth a year in the Puget Sound region alone. It is important that our region stay economically competitive in the 21st century. The congestion that slows our drive to a crawl also affects our ability to move goods, hurts our ports and reduces their ability to be part of the growing Pacific Rim market. A high-quality transit system can help move more people and reduce demand on the rest of the transportation system.

An American Public Transit Association study also found that a transit investment can have economic benefits — every dollar invested in transit capital generates three dollars in business sales. The RTA estimates that 3,000 construction jobs will be created to build the proposed system.



### What can we do about air pollution?

Cars are our largest source of air pollution and energy use. And there are more motor vehicles in our region than people. Without other options for getting around people will continue to rely on their cars as their main source of transportation. So, air pollution will get worse while energy use continues to rise. The RTA's regional transit system can provide an alternative to driving. And the light-rail system will be powered by energy-efficient, non-polluting electricity.





Regional answers —  
the Phase I Regional Transit System

The Regional Transit Authority is a new public agency charged with developing and delivering a regional transit system to the citizens of King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. The RTA is proposing a system that fights worsening congestion by offering new ways of moving people. The first phase of that system includes commuter rail using existing railroad tracks, light rail using new tracks, regional bus lines, a “seamless” service concept and a special fund for local transit projects. On March 14, you’ll be asked to vote on whether to fund the Phase I transit system with a  $\frac{4}{10}$  of one percent increase in local sales tax and a  $\frac{3}{10}$  of one percent increase in local license plate tab tax. No property taxes will be used to fund the system. The ballot measure requires a simple majority vote to pass. Here’s a description of the components of the transit system you’ll be asked to vote on:

Commuter rail

The RTA wants to take advantage of existing railroad tracks when possible. To do this, the authority will upgrade existing tracks and signal systems, build stations and add some new track. The result: a commuter rail system offering passenger service connecting Everett, Mukilteo, Edmonds, Seattle, Tukwila, Kent, Auburn, Sumner, Puyallup, Tacoma and Lakewood. Though the name implies a system that serves only people going to work, the bi-level commuter trains are expected to run throughout the day (every 30 minutes during rush hours and hourly the rest of the day) serving shoppers, students and tourists as well. Service between Seattle and Tacoma will begin operating two to three years after a positive vote. The commuter rail lines will be extended to Everett and Lakewood within a year after that.



Light rail

Many of the destinations people in the region travel to aren’t near existing railroad tracks. Phase I includes adding new track for three light-rail lines connecting cities in all three counties. The three lines will take 16 years to complete, but parts of the system would begin operating as they are built. The system will use comfortable, modern electric-powered rail cars that accelerate quickly. Trains are expected to run every 2 to 15 minutes throughout the day carrying about 170,000 passengers per day by the year 2010 (the Portland light-rail system currently carries 24,000 passengers per day).

Much of the light-rail system will run at street level in exclusive rights-of-way. Some segments will run in exclusive medians with cross-traffic at intersections controlled by special signals. Certain constraints require that parts of the system be grade separated. Based on the current plan, the 68-mile light-rail system would remove traffic lanes from less than 4 miles of street.



A north line will run from 164th Street S.W. in Snohomish County to Lynnwood, Northgate, the University District, Capitol Hill, and downtown Seattle. An east line will run from downtown Seattle to Mercer Island, Bellevue and Redmond (Overlake) via the Interstate 90 bridge. A south line will run from downtown Seattle to Rainier Valley, Boeing Access Road, SeaTac, Federal Way, Fife and downtown Tacoma. The RTA will also begin building a starter transit line using bus or rail in the Interstate 405 corridor between South Kirkland, Bellevue, Renton, Tukwila and Sea-Tac Airport.

Regional bus lines

Phase I includes new regional bus lines providing express transit service in rail corridors before rail lines begin running, and serving areas not directly linked by rail lines. The RTA intends to contract with the region’s existing bus operators to run these regional bus routes. Regional bus service will run every 15 to 30 minutes. To help provide faster and more frequent service, regional bus lines will make limited stops. Regional bus lines will be operating within three years of a positive vote.



A “seamless” system

The simpler it is to use a transit system, the more people will use it. To create a “seamless” trip for people using the system, the RTA will help develop a single, coordinated fare system with passes or tickets accepted by transit operators throughout the region. You’ll be able to board buses, light-rail or commuter trains and travel and transfer throughout the region regardless of the agency operating the service.



Fund for local transit projects

The region’s diverse communities have diverse needs. Phase I also includes a special fund to pay for local transit projects tailored to the specific needs of communities while supporting the regional transit system. The fund will be distributed throughout the region and can be used for such things as transit centers where different types of transit connect, or to provide better local bus service connecting to the regional bus or rail lines.

Paying for the system

Building and operating the Phase I transit system will cost \$6.7 billion (\$1995). About 50 percent of the cost is expected to be paid for with a combination of federal and state grants, farebox revenues, borrowed funds, private sources and interest revenues. If the RTA receives less federal or state funding than expected, the system construction schedule will be extended to stay within Phase I financial guidelines. The remaining 50 percent would come from voter-approved local taxes limited to a  $\frac{4}{10}$  of one percent increase in local sales tax and a  $\frac{3}{10}$  of one percent increase in local vehicle license tab tax within the RTA District. No property taxes will be used to fund the transit system. The average household would pay about \$8 per month in added sales tax and license tab tax to build and run the system. This assumes an average annual household income of \$40,000 with two vehicles per household valued at \$6,500 each. The RTA will regularly review Phase I system implementation. The RTA will conduct a major review of the system after 10 years and issue a status report to voters. That report will be used to help develop future recommendations. The local tax package will be reduced after 16 years to a level necessary to operate the system, pay off borrowed funds, and replace equipment or facilities. Funds for any future transit system phases supported by additional taxes would require voter approval.

